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ABSTRACT

A 7-week project was carried out at the University of Cincinnati (Ohio) which had the following goals: (1) teaching students enrolled in two sections of an interpersonal communication course about nonverbal communication, focusing on popular advertising and how such advertising exemplifies various areas within nonverbal communication theory; (2) involving students in experiential learning by including them in the research and development of an educational slide show and accompanying audiotape; and (3) using the presentation for future instruction. After completion and observation of the presentation by 34 students, they were asked to write a brief report evaluating their involvement in the project as a learning experience. Student responses to these questions indicated that their participation in the project was an enjoyable, positive learning experience. The slide show was presented to 38 students from two sections of the course in the following semester, who then completed a written survey which quizzed them on their knowledge of the concepts covered in the presentation, and solicited their views on the effectiveness of the presentation. Students who observed the presentation exhibited correct understanding of the nonverbal concepts and agreed that the presentation benefited their learning of the material. Comparison of students who produced the presentation with the students who only observed the presentation indicated that the students who produced the presentation gained a more thorough appreciation of the application and relevance of nonverbal communication concepts. (Ten references and a survey are attached.) (ARH)

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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN POPULAR MAGAZINE ADVERTISING

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Nonverbal communication is recognized as a primary influence in the human interaction process. As a professor of interpersonal communication, I seek to highlight the many ways nonverbal communication evidences itself in our daily lives. This paper focuses on nonverbal communication in popular advertising and how such advertising exemplifies various areas within nonverbal communication theory.

To work toward these ends I not only seek to show students examples of nonverbal communication in popular advertising, I also try to involve them in the research process, thus allowing them to work with me in selecting examples of popular advertising that evidence nonverbal communication areas. We used popular magazine advertising, in this particular project, as a data base for this experiential learning process.

Experiential learning offers the student an opportunity to learn by doing. It is learning "in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied."[1] This process involves "not merely observing the phenomenon being studied but also doing something with it, such as testing the dynamics of the reality to learn more about it, or applying the theory learned about it to achieve some desired results."[2] This type of learning can be achieved in or outside of the traditional classroom environment.

David Kolb has developed the idea of experiential learning into a theory of the learning cycle. Kolb believes "experience is

translated into concepts which in turn are used as guides in the choice of new experiences."[3] He describes the learning cycle as consisting of four interdependent steps: 1) Immediate concrete experience is the basis for 2) Observation and reflection 3) which is assimilated into the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations from which implications for action are deduced, and 4) followed by testing implications of concepts in new situations. Kolb states step four leads to step one (concrete experience) and, thus, the cycle is complete.[4]

Experiential learning is unique in comparison with mere lecture as it employs a variety of our senses not often used in traditional classroom lecture environments. I developed this project to provide students an opportunity to build from information provided in class lectures with the objective of helping them learn by being able to understand and apply fundamental nonverbal communication concepts.

The project lasted seven weeks (of a ten week quarter) and included participation from two sections of the basic interpersonal communication course at the University of Cincinnati. It involved ten primary steps.

1) The class was divided into groups to review a wide variety of popular magazines (i.e. Newsweek, Cosmopolitan, Rolling Stone, Reader's Digest, etc.).
2) They collected advertisements which exemplified nonverbal communication areas discussed in class lectures and assigned readings.
3) We compiled collected advertisements under various nonverbal communication classification areas (i.e. kinesics, proxemics,

objectics, etc.). An advertisement was placed in a classification area when the behavior in the photograph exemplified a nonverbal communication behavior. For example, an advertisement with two people looking into each others eyes exemplified eye behavior. Student groups submitted advertisements in various nonverbal categories and defended their submissions with the instructor.

4) We look through the advertisements in each nonverbal communication classification area to see which classification areas were best exemplified by the advertisements collected. Primary criteria for this process was the quality of the photographs (regarding their depiction of the nonverbal areas). Quantity of advertisements was a secondary criteria. We narrowed the nonverbal communication classifications to six areas, from a field of twelve, which we focused on in the presentation. The six areas were physical characteristics, artifacts, kinesics, touching behavior, proxemics, and environmental factors.

5) Ten advertisements were chosen for photographing in each of the six nonverbal classification areas. Criteria for selection was based on the degree to which the photograph depicted the particular nonverbal behavior. The photographed advertisements were developed into slides.

6) The slides were organized into the aforementioned six nonverbal areas.

7) We wrote a script describing the six nonverbal categories and how these categories were observed in popular magazine advertising. Description of popular magazine advertising was based on the advertisements chosen for inclusion in the six nonverbal areas.

8) Background music was selected for portions of the presentation. Criteria for selection was based on our ability to adapt musical lyrics to meanings portrayed in the six nonverbal areas.

9) An audio cassette tape was recorded (narration and music). The tape included an introduction, description of the six nonverbal areas, discussion of selected advertisements which depict each of the six nonverbal areas, emphasis on the relevance of these depictions, and a conclusion. Slides were organized in an order which supported and complemented the audio tape.

10) The final product was presented in class.

This project was completed during the winter term of 1987, and was intended to serve as an experiential learning tool for the two sections participating in the production. A second objective was to produce a presentation which could be used to describe nonverbal communication concepts during future instruction in sections of the basic interpersonal communication course at the University of Cincinnati.

After completion and observation of the presentation, each student who participated in the production of the presentation was asked to write a brief one-page report on their involvement in the project as a learning experience. I asked them to respond to the following questions:

A) Was this project a positive learning experience? If yes, why? If no, why not?

B) How did your participation in this type of project affect your learning of nonverbal communication areas (as opposed to using lecture as a means of learning the material)?

C) The nonverbal communication areas covered in the project will be included on the final examination. Has your participation in the project enhanced your learning of these concepts enough to ensure correct answers to exam questions?

Thirty four students participated in the production of the presentation and 33 of them completed the evaluation assignment. Student responses to these questions indicated their participation in the project was enjoyable and a positive learning experience. The following numerical categories correspond with the aforementioned question areas.

A) All students completing the evaluation assignment indicated it was a positive learning experience. Responses generally indicated their participation was positive because they learned the material and enjoyed being actively involved with the learning process.

B) A vast majority of the 33 students completing the evaluation assignment indicated their initial understanding of the nonverbal communication areas was based on class lectures and assigned textbook readings. However, they emphasized the project gave them an opportunity to build from this information considerably and better understand its applications and relevance in their day-to-day interactions. The ability to apply the information and understand its relevance seemed to be the primary benefit of participation in the project.

C) The final examination had six questions dealing with the six nonverbal communication areas covered in the project. All of the students felt participation in the project enhanced their

understanding of the six nonverbal areas. Thirty-three of the 34 students taking the final examination answered all six nonverbal communication questions correctly while one student missed two of the six questions.

As mentioned earlier, a secondary objective was to produce a presentation which could be used to describe nonverbal communication concepts for future sections of the basic interpersonal communication course. The presentation was used for this purpose in two sections of the basic interpersonal communication course at the University of Cincinnati during the fall, 1987 term.

Students in both sections completed a written survey which quizzed them on their knowledge of the six main categories of nonverbal communication covered in the presentation, and solicited their views on the effectiveness of the presentation in helping them better understand nonverbal communication. A copy of this survey is included in Appendix A.

Thirty-eight students (from both sections) observed the presentation and completed the survey. Thirty-five of these students answered all six matching questions correctly (which involved matching the nonverbal category with the correct definition). The remaining three students answered four of the six matching questions correctly.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement. "The presentation has helped me better understand nonverbal communication and how it exists within society." Thirty-seven percent "strongly agreed", 55% "agreed", and 8% were "neutral". No participants "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the statement.

The use of this project as an experiential learning tool was

beneficial to the students who worked on the project and the product of the experiential efforts has also served well as a teaching aid for other sections of the basic interpersonal communication course. The aforementioned discussion of responses from students who worked on the project clearly indicates they perceived their learning experience to be enhanced due to their participation in the learning process. Their abilities on the final examination support this contention.

Students who observed the presentation exhibited a correct understanding of the nonverbal concepts (as found in the survey) and indicated agreement that the presentation benefited their learning of the material. Comparison of the students who produced the presentation versus the students who only observed the presentation indicates, while both groups learned the material, the students who produced the presentation gained a more thorough appreciation of the application and relevance of the nonverbal communication concepts. This can be attributed to the degree they worked with the nonverbal materials and their active participation in the learning process.

Students who produced the presentation experienced an enhanced learning opportunity. According to Keeton and Tate, this enhanced learning experience occurred because the students did not merely observe the phenomena being studied, but they also applied the theory to achieve a desired result.[5] Active participation in the learning process provided the bridge to this enhanced learning experience.

The students who produced the presentation experienced Kolb's

learning cycle described earlier in this paper. Concrete experience was used as a basis for observation and reflection which was assimilated into the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations which led to testing implications of concepts in new situations[6]. As described by Kolb, these four steps lead to the initial step of concrete experience.

Notes

[1]Keeton, T. and J. Tate. Learning By Experience--What, Why, How. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1978, p. 2.

[2]Keeton and Tate, P. 2.

[3]Kolb, D.A. Learning Style Inventory: Technical Manual. Boston: McBer and Co., 1976, p. 2.

[4]Kolb, pp. 2-3.

[5]Keeton and Tate, p. 3.

[6]Kolb, pp. 2-3.

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APPENDIX A

_____ Physical Characteristics	A. deals with clothing, jewelery, and beauty aids
_____ Artifacts	B. deals with body shape, hair color, and similar traits
_____ Kinesics	C. deals with the expression of emotions such as loving, caring, etc.
_____ Touching Behavior	D. deals with body movements and gestures
_____ Proxemics	E. deals with space and how we use it
_____ Environmental Factors	F. deals with physical surroundings and how the physical surroundings affect perceptions of the individual

The presentation has helped me better understand nonverbal communication and how it exists within society.

strongly agree

agree

neutral

disagree

strongly disagree